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ABSTRACT

An art teacher believes in implementing a hands-on approach to learning. Whenever possible, the instructor encourages students to learn from or experience through some form of art activity. Teachers can exercise the imaginations of their students while providing the impetus they need to understand the world and each other better. Whether a teacher's students keep journals, compare stories, or enact a play, the teacher can easily introduce art as another tool for the students to use. Examples and explanations of different activities show how classroom teachers can encourage students to be original, spontaneous, and unique. (Author/BT)

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Abstract

Art as a Tool in the Classroom: Activating the Aesthetic Sense

By Francene G. Fallick

As an art teacher, I believe in implementing a hands on approach to learning. Whenever possible I encourage my students to, learn from or, experience through some form of art activity. Teachers can exercise the imaginations of their students while providing the impetus they need to better understand the world and each other. Whether your students are keeping journals, comparing stories, or enacting a play, teachers can easily introduce art as another tool for their students to use. Here are some examples of how classroom teachers can encourage students to be original, spontaneous and unique.

Francene G. Fallick

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Art as a Tool in the Classroom: Activating the Aesthetic Sense

Once upon a time, I had a Kindergarten teacher, and her name was Mrs. Goodfriend. She informed my mother that I was a creative child. Unfortunately I remember very little about my kindergarten experience. However, I do recall some of my elementary years. I remember the art curriculum as having been rather dismal. Whether in spite of or in response to this, I did and do exercise an aesthetic sense.

I've been a teacher for a shorter length of time than I've been an artist. Having evolved into a teacher of art, I now feel a sense of duty to share, impart or awaken others to the potential of an aesthetic sensibility. Which I am now able to pursue while working in a Kindergarten through eighth grade public school. Armed with the *New York State Standards for The Arts*, I collaborate with classroom teachers on various projects. I am learning lessons from them as well.

Seeing first hand what other educators refer to (with similar disbelief) as ready-made or cookie-cutter art, is disheartening. Perhaps this is why we now have the standards for guidance? Possibly some teachers have yielded to time

constraints, feel a need for perfection, or have a fear of 100% pure-child-made art? Their reasons may differ and I sympathize with only a few. I'd much rather use my time to enlighten or empower such teachers whenever possible.

In some classes we have collaborated on a specific theme, project or predicament. It's wonderful to work with a colleague who welcomes my efforts. Which in turn benefits the students. I have been witness to much problem solving in the classroom. One of our fifth grade classes was preparing for a play. This involved researching, sketching and planning their scenery. These students gained a great sense of pride and accomplishment from this endeavor. As well as a new found respect for their efforts in art and a joy in the creative process.

Other days I work with classes, on my own, where literacy is the motivator for our lessons. This is usually part of the after-school program. Here I have had exceptional experiences and results with the children. One major factor for this success, I believe, is due to the small size of our groups. Which may be as few as six or as much as ten students. Whether they are creating their own simple stories or books, or engaged in retelling a story, students become exposed to

literacy in a joyful atmosphere. All of my sessions with them involve an art process or art project.

With one first grade group my use of the tape recorder (for my college studies) turned out to be the highlight of the session. The children could not wait to listen to and identify their voices on the recorder! However, the other component of this lesson was our creation of our *semantic web.* Based upon a version of "The Gingerbread Man", each child shared one thing they did well. On a dry-erase board, using various color markers, we collected and depicted all the children in our group. First drawing one large circle I then wrote in it's center.. Things I Do Well. Radiating from the circle's circumference were ten little lines displaying each child's name together with the activity each did well. After this discussion, I gave them drawing paper on which they created their own gingerbread people. Onto the person they added the thing they did well. Coloring, decorating and cutting out their person were the finishing steps. Thus we covered literacy, creativity and manipulation of tools.

Another wonderful story, which inspired me further, came from our school library. I was in need of a story to read

and discovered "The Paper Princess" on the shelf. This story has served me and my students well. A newly created paper-doll is blown away by a gust of wind, from the little girl who drew her. The story revolves around the adventures of this little paper doll until she is reunited with the little girl. Of course I could not resist adding an art extension to this story. To suit the reality of my students I drew my own paper-doll outlines/stencils. On two separate sheets of regular drawing paper I drew one girl and one boy. Neither one had hair on their heads, for this was also an important part of the story. I have used these outlines countless times, after reading this story, especially when I substitute for Kindergarten and first grade classes. I have found that this process offers children a bit more confidence in their drawing abilities at this early stage of their life. I would recommend this for pre-kindergarten children as well.

When introducing stories to many of my classes I have found the use of the semantic/word web, Venn Diagram and/or the K-W-L chart as the most successful hand-in-hand combination for my art activities with the students. Each day I become more enthusiastic in pursuing or discovering new ways

and means for sharing art with my students and colleagues.

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